



Between You'n' me

By MURRAY OLDERMAN
SPORTS EDITOR

NEWSPAPER ENTERPRISE ASSN.

VERO BEACH, Fla. (NEA) — Phil Regan, a gaunt figure of a pitcher with a herky-jerky delivery that looks like he's shuffling cards sideways, it all figured out. He'll be better off pitching for the Los Angeles Dodgers this year without Sandy Koufax on the same staff.

Offhand, that sounds ridiculous because Phil, as the resident game-saver in the Los Angeles bullpen, appeared in 65 games last summer. And since Koufax alone pitched 27 complete games, Phil should be thinking about putting in for overtime in O'Malleyland.

"Don Drysdale, with spring training, will complete more games," reasoned Regan. "So will Don Sutton with that year's experience. We still have Claude Osteen to make it a Big Three. And Bob Miller or another kid could come in there to take up the slack for Sandy. So I don't think I'll be working harder."

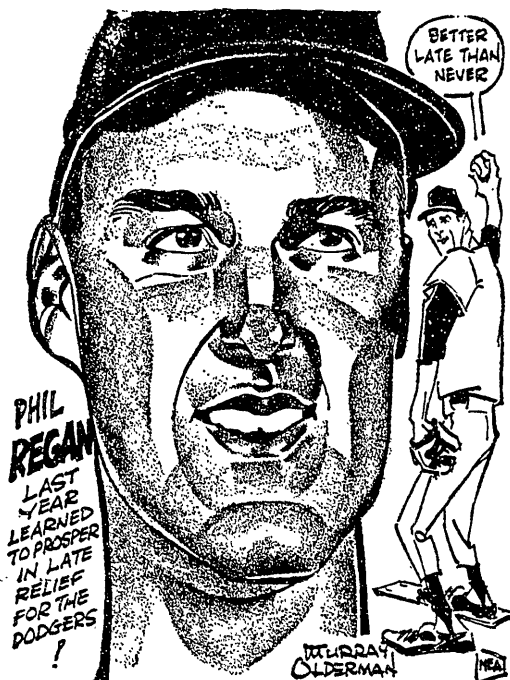
Or enjoying it less. Phil's reveling in his role as a late-blooming baseball star. A year ago, he came to camp with the Dodgers wondering when he'd be sent to Spokane.

The profession of pitching is broken up three ways: 1) those who start games; 2) those who relieve in the third, fourth or fifth innings and therefore are called long relief men; 3) those who toil primarily in the eighth or ninth innings and thus are short relievers.

"Last year," mused Phil, "my 11th in organized baseball was the first time I'd never started a ball game in one season. I came to camp with the feeling I'd still be a starter . . . they'd let Sutton (then a 20-year-old rookie) start a couple of games and then I'd get my chance. In the meantime I worked long relief."

One night Regan pitched five strong innings

THE 'SHORT' MAN



and waited for his starting call. Manager Walter Alston told him, "Now, Phil, you're a candidate for short relief." It's nerve-wracking work with games hanging on every pitch.

Two nights later, he came into a game against the Chicago Cubs with the Dodgers trailing, 2-1, in the eighth inning, two runners on base and dangerous Ernie Banks at bat. He induced Banks to hit into a double play. In the Dodger half of the eighth, Jim Lefebvre hit a three-run homer and Regan had his first win.

"Say," he said to himself, "this relief pitching isn't half bad." Phil went on to win 14 games and lose one, a phenomenal debut in the National League. He also got credit for 17 official saves and altogether appeared in 39 games which the Dodgers won.

"Until last year," he said, "I'd never been in over 38 games in a season." Back in 1963, he had won 15 games for the Detroit Tigers as a starter, but two years later was back in the minors at Syracuse—partly because he didn't relish the idea of transferring to the bullpen.

When the Dodgers swapped a utility infielder, Dick Tracewski, for Regan minutes before the mid-night interleague trading deadline on Dec. 15, 1965 (the Dodgers' 1967 press book says the deal won a penant for them), Phil stopped arguing.

"It's different," he admitted. "When I was in Detroit, I was leaving in the seventh, eighth or ninth inning and here I am coming in in this type of situation. I was quite nervous but halfway through last season I got so I liked it, coming to the ball park every night and knowing I might get into every game."

"People said our club didn't hit much, but our hitters were pretty good to me."

Phil picked up so many relief wins from Dodger starters who faltered, they began calling him "The Vulture." But habits long ingrained are hard to get out of the system entirely. On the Dodger trip to Japan last winter, Phil went to Dodger coach Danny Ozark with the plea he be allowed to start a couple of games.

"They were giving away good prizes," he explained, "for the winning pitchers over there, like expensive watches. And I wanted to win one."

Couldn't he do it in relief?

"Your team has to be behind first," he said slyly.

The Dodgers played 20 games in Japan without a nine-inning performance by a pitcher. Phil was in 14 of them, all in relief.

"There's no point in you starting," manager Alston relayed a message, "when that's not what you're going to be doing next season."

As he told the story, Phil smiled and asked what time it was.